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SUBJECT: JERUSALEM MEDIA REACTION (12/18): "ACTION - NOT JUST LIP SERVICE"

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Main Stories:  
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Al Quds and Al Ayyam lead with the, "escalation of violence" in Gaza where one Palestinian was killed and four others injured, including a child, in an Israeli artillery attack on Tal Z'atar neighborhood in the northern Gaza Strip on December 17. The papers note that the truce between Hamas and Israel is scheduled to end December 18. The papers cite news agencies in reporting that Palestinian militants responded to the attack by firing 15 projectiles onto Israel's southern town of Sderot. Al Quds adds, citing Israeli daily Maariv that the Israeli military has developed offensive plans for action in the Gaza Strip that could result in the killing of 800 Palestinians or more. Al Quds also quotes Israeli Premier Olmert stating on December 17 that Israel will respond to Palestinian rocket fire from Gaza. Finally, Al Hayat Al Jadida's front page quotes a high ranking officer of the Israeli military commenting that the U.S. has ordered all staff in Israel to use armored vehicles when traveling to Sderot, just as it does in Iraq or Afghanistan.

Al Hayat Al Jadida leads with, and all front pages highlight, statements by Palestinian Authority President Mahmud Abbas on December 17, insisting that the Palestinian Authority is seeking simultaneous elections in the West Bank and Gaza Strip for early next year. In comments made after a meeting with Austrian President Fischer, Abbas added that, "if we have an agreement with Israel, we will proceed with it, even if we face opposition." Speaking about his trip to the United States, Abbas noted that the visit will be to express, "appreciation for everything President Bush has done towards reaching a [peace] agreement." Abbas continued that, "not having reached an agreement does not mean that we have failed, and I call on the American presidency to make every effort to ensure the success of our plans in the Middle East." Al Ayyam's front page reports that Abbas will seek U.S. guarantees on continuing the peace

process with Israel.

Al Quds' front page quotes Palestinian Authority Prime Minister Fayyad stating on December 17 at a meeting with his Tunisian counterpart in Tunis, that the Palestinian people are resolute on safeguarding all their internationally recognized national rights. Al Quds' front page quotes Bethlehem Mayor Victor Patarsah accusing Israel of attempting to spoil Christmas festivals in the city. He pointed to recent Israeli military action in the area, "storming" Bethlehem and surrounding villages and arresting youth, occupying a Palestinian house and hoisting the Israeli flag over it. He characterized the actions as attempts to scare away tourists and terrorize Palestinian civilians.

Al Ayyam's inside page cites a report by the British Foreign Office that designates Israeli settlements as illegal and in violation of international law. The statement considers settlement expansion an obstacle to peace, according to reporting.

Al Ayyam's front page cites DPA when quoting Osama Mazini, a Hamas member dealing with the case of captured Israeli soldier Shalit, revealing that Israel has turned down a European offer to mediate on a prisoner exchange deal between Israel and Hamas. The paper also cites news agencies in reporting that Hamas chief Khalid Mish'al turned down an offer by former President Jimmy Carter to unilaterally extend the truce with Israel for six months.

In public affairs news, all inside pages report that Palestinian Authority Deputy Minister of Women's Affairs Salwa Hudayb met in Ramallah on December 17 with a U.S. Consulate delegation from the Public Affairs section to discuss the establishment of a Palestinian committee for combating violence against women and other training and capacity building activities. Consulate representatives also

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briefed Hudayb on their preparations for a month long series of activities to mark International Women's Day on March 8. Meanwhile, an inside page in Al Hayat Al Jadida reports on the experiences of a Palestinian student from Jerusalem who participated in a U.S. Government funded summer writing workshop. A Consulate press officer is quoted noting that the workshop is one among many activities organized for Palestinian youth.

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BLOCK QUOTES:  
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1) Adli Sadiq editorializes in Al Hayat Al Jadida under the title, "Fatwa and pursuit" (12/18): "[Palestinian Authority] elections without Gaza, would consolidate the obvious Israeli and American victory [of separating Gaza from the West Bank], whereas elections that include Gaza, without political change within Hamas, would also constitute a trap for both Hamas and Fatah. The Palestinian Authority's embrace of the illusion of U.S. support for the establishment of an independent Palestinian state is like the behavior of someone sad and ignorant. Fatah's embrace of its own shabby condition, however, will only accelerate the coming of an Islamic surprise."

2) Al Quds' editorial is titled, "More peace talk" (12/18): "The [Arab] region and we Palestinians in particular, need action and not just lip service. We need the implementation of resolutions, not the passing of new ones... no one is fooled anymore by what they hear since the formula remains the same: an economically, militarily and politically strong Israel faces a weakened, oppressed Arab world, and a divided Palestinian people..."

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